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AN OBSERVATION OF *CYMAENES TRIPUNCTUS* (HESPERIIDAE) IN NORTH-CENTRAL FLORIDA

Cymaenes tripunctus (Herrich-Schäffer) (Fig. 1) is a widely distributed species occurring in southern Florida, the West Indies and southward to Argentina (Pyle 1981; Cech & Tudor 2005). The precise range of *C. tripunctus* in Florida has been difficult to determine due to its secretive habits, as well as confusion and misidentification, in both the field and museum collections, with the similar *Lerodea eufala* (W. H. Edwards) and *Nastra neamathla* (Skinner & R. C. Williams) (Smith *et al.* 1994; Glassberg *et al.* 2000). Long antennae, approximately one-half the length of the forewing, distinguish *C. tripunctus* from other similar-sized dark-colored hesperiid species (Opler & Krizek 1984; Smith *et al.* 1994; Glassberg *et al.* 2000).

Kimball (1965) only reported a few records of *C. tripunctus* from extreme southern Florida and the Florida Keys. In addition, many of the earliest butterfly lists for Florida regarded observations of *C. tripunctus* in the state as dubious or merely representing strays from Cuba (Skinner & Williams 1924; Barnes & Benjamin 1926; McDunnough 1938). Freeman (1942) reported the first verified sightings of *C. tripunctus* from specimens collected as early as 1937 in Miami. The rarity of early *C. tripunctus* records in Florida suggests the species may have only colonized the state in the relatively recent past. Lenczewski (1980) reported *C. tripunctus* as abundant within Everglades National Park. However, Calhoun (1988) encountered *C. tripunctus* in Lee County for first time on 11 December 1983 and suggested the species might be expanding its range northward in the state. Marc C. Minno (pers. comm.) found *C. tripunctus* to be locally common in Broward County in 1982 to 1984. Subsequently, *C. tripunctus* colonies have been encountered locally in Polk (Lake Kissimmee State Park), Osceola (Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park) and Pinellas (Fort Desoto State Park, Boyd Hill Nature Center) counties in association with several larval host plants, indicating further expansion of the species northward (Linda Cooper, Lyn Atherton and Tim Adams, pers. comms.). Robinson *et al.* (2002) and Minno *et al.* (2005) identified numerous grass species used by *C. tripunctus* as larval host plants in Florida including *Digitaria ciliaris* (Retz.) Koel., *Tripsacum dactyloides* (L.) L., *Urochloa mutica* (Forsk.) Nguyen, *Paspalum setaceum* Michx., *Panicum maximum* Jacq., and *Setaria macrosperma* (Scribn. & Merr.) K. Schum. (Poaceae). While available food sources do not appear to be a limiting factor for *C. tripunctus*, the cold winters of northern Florida may prevent the species from colonizing further into the southeastern United States.

On 28 September 2002 we observed and photographed a single *C. tripunctus* at Newnan's Lake in Gainesville, Florida (Alachua County) (Fig. 2). Although *C. tripunctus* is listed for Alachua County on the Butterflies and Moths of North America website (Opler *et al.* 2006) (http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/species?l=2046) this listing appears to be based on

FIG. 1. *Cymaenes tripunctus* at Newnan's Lake, Gainesville, Florida (Alachua County) on 28 September 2002 (Photo: H. L. Salvato).

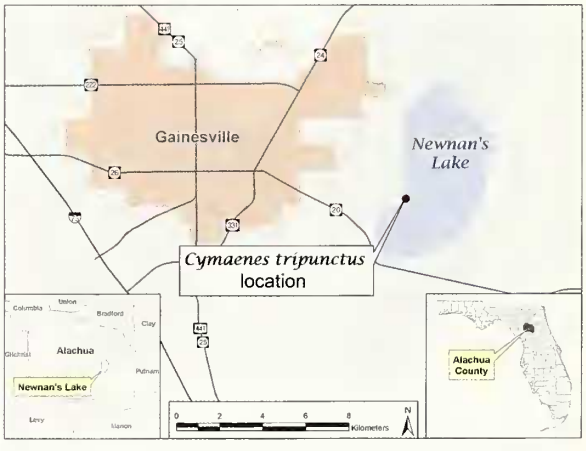

FIG. 2. Location of Newnan's Lake and the *C. tripunctus* observation in Gainesville, Florida (Alachua County).

dubious reports (John V. Calhoun, state records compiler for Florida, pers. comm.). Therefore, to our knowledge this represents the first confirmed observation of *C. tripunctus* in north-central Florida. In the years following our initial observation (2003 to 2007) we returned to Newnan's Lake on several occasions in the late summer and fall to search for *C. tripunctus* but failed to re-encounter the species.

Although we observed no signs of reproduction during our 2002 observation, several host plants for *C. tripunctus*, including *P. maximum*, *P. setaceum*, *Saccharum* spp. and other grass species, occur within the vicinity of Newnan's Lake. Therefore *C. tripunctus* may have established a small temporary population at Newnan's Lake during or prior to the 2002 observation. Further studies are needed to determine if *C. tripunctus* continues to occur at Newnan's Lake. In addition, the status and distribution of *C. tripunctus* should be monitored at the periphery of the species known range to identify any other localized populations.

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